

# LIGHTSIGNATURES

THIRD BOOK OF ODES

POEMS

STEVEN FRATTALI

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of

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Press of Taipei, 101 Song Ling Rd., Hsinchu, Taiwan, ROC  
300.

Email: [thebanyanpress@gmail.com](mailto:thebanyanpress@gmail.com)





The fallen  
And scattered from the earth  
Now  
Light  
    crumbling bits  
    of the world  
The sun's place empty

---

Fall

dark comes

when

over us

our steps sky star  
shell

We walk upon  
the leaf's web

of light

through the dark

---

Trees in the red

Light  
we feel

frozen

breath like smoke

drop night's stars

in the well

---

In autumn

the earth

cobalt not the sky  
empty space

then

brimming  
stars

still

alone

The earthly fields

---



Where I have come to  
the evening fall  
out the sun  
through the small green  
late light sparks  
of my stars  
the green twilight

---

Late  
smoke clouds  
and freezing rain  
the streets  
skin of  
branches  
a street light  
A falling past the light  
around  
the black street  
is shiny

---

Given

to worlds

night

leaves of spring

moonlight

cracked and veined

and flowing stone-colored

of wind

---

Stem

leaf by leaf

August that brings

all

of

what the garden

the tangled  
deep in

one

And then

silent noon   silent noon  
slowly

---

The path

all rain

and air

listen hear

water dripping

perfect rain

of being

breathe

---

Sun  
black

world burnt

hills  
of clouds

bright poison sky

The earth darkening

---

Grass      sun

hay

almost

feel

the wind

noon

soaks

each blade

---

The dust road  
gravel glittered   sun  
watery heat   far off  
above   so dry  
below   my shoes   the road  
In the middle  
I walked   how still

---



What is  
being

sunlight

medium in which

The light

seek out

above around

currents of feel

of what is

And yet

let go

---

The sun

bright field

sleep of afternoon

slowly

deepening

hot

the air

in time

of day

---

Sun is quiet  
So never cease  
to some single sound  
in the day  
Felt in this  
felt in light  
for an hour  
just this

---

Feel the  
night rain

tree surf wind

to know the sources

rain beauty  
of lightning

's form

dark-surface lightning-core

---

What  
shading out

hottest sun

something then lost  
found something  
remembered  
hands

hair

dark and  
partial leaves  
the dim well mirror

---

The water beads  
streaming

skin  
rose from

what rainbath

But where my lips  
waver  
like a bee

the rose cannot be touched

---

Face close

grass to ground hair tips of

still field  
sweet breath

of day

earth scent of green shadows

head down to

near there  
breathe

---

Beans twine twist tangle  
the stake lightrivers  
flood wide deltas  
of the leaf  
that stretches wider  
aching arching in sun  
burns dead parchment by  
autumn

---



Evening

and the garden

agitated  
by the wind

the deep wind

elsewhere

beneath the sunset plane

behind and beyond  
the planes of

light

under the door the

cloud-hill crack

the burning traces

---

You sleep in the  
dim light  
a bedroom

bright world shut away

in the dark closet  
of curtains blinds

then suffused soft gold

at morning

Washed in light walls cry aloud

silently eggshell white

Hear do not  
hear  
But stir

Do not look  
but see

inwardly

Break the shell slowly

---

Beneath  
August sun

Now here

the tall grass  
lost in light

the fields staggering  
in wind

in the heat and a dry leaf

burned at the stem

flutters down still air

here

---

Morning

the breaking light

bright spokes put through  
orange cloud

across still black  
jade green fields

on still dim arsenic green  
dusty spotlights of yellow

poured copper in the irrigation ditch

and in the black canal

a silver lorry on one road  
misted in light

one red tractor moving in one field

---

Fragrant garden  
ripened in the sun

White flower  
in the light

The day is hot

---

Day bright  
high day sky

luminous aura

day

sky blue blue beyond blue

bright nowhere

Still the night air                      this  
scent that  
    summer night is  
  
so secret  
  
    all your memories  
  
  even you don't know

---

The breeze blows through  
the night's sieve

stars are small seeds  
in the pulp of darkness

huge summer tree arching upward

summer's fullest fruit

is the night itself

---

You come

in your white dress  
that falls away

your body just visible  
in the room

---

The  
wind bright and

unseen

the day's sun plane

the day's blue  
pond sky

lily pad islands

of cloud float slow  
and slowly

tree ripples

wind currents

far deep in the blue

---



Light

sovereign

presence

silent majesty

unlimited infinite

glory

intangible yet all powerful

light nothing more than

light yet

beyond light

light beyond light

light merely

---

Bright razor of sunsilt  
beyond tundra like fields

amber pelt hills  
purpling dim

now black trees  
craze the snow paths

frozen still

and now real night

edge time  
of the owl's feather

where

---

Fields of the snow river

flatly blazing high

sun

through

the empty

sky

blue erased script on snow

yet

aching bright

the radiant

blank page of sun

---

The field  
simmers in                      its own silence  
deep sunlight on grass  
high grass so lonely  
no path  
White butterflies  
                                 light as paper bits  
                                 tumbling up  
up their tingling                      helix  
in the sun

---

In the darkness

I only touch

stream pebbles

the stream

can't be held

in my room  
the walls are near

the light through  
the window

neither near  
nor far

---

Veins of  
light leaf vein

(rippling

of my lung

stem and root  
of earth

(shimmering bright

gathered in my spine

(water of the  
pond surface  
full of clouds

---

Sun  
sleep  
in the flower's

seed

stem and the root

of earth

Into being  
the one

brings itself at last  
the sun

---

Dust  
and dry            the ground  
                     released  
  
                     from  
  
                     opening    closed    cracked  
  
fields seethe    sifting  
dry leaves and hay  
are  
  
knives sharpening on themselves  
  
yellow land    pale land where  
water cannot flow  
  
                     air dry and hot  
winds blow  
  
sky high    white blue    blue  
  
empty sky    day clear  
  
                     from here  
  
to where

---



Listening

near sleep

rustling

dry leaves moon water

poured through

summer moon hot and

big

black leaves shadow branches

like rivers of sleep

listening night music

earth drift swaying

so much

so much

going where

---

The grass

intricate shadows  
a script

beneath  
the sun the trees

the air the sky the high clouds

drifting

shadow cloth passing wiping the day

then gone day sky

opening again and more

changing  
square of grass

to a plane of green light

shadow script erased

---

The sky

deep blue  
wind    bright intervals

between floating clouds

rooftops spark    shine    here    there

bright floss drifts in bright air

the park then  
and the flowing sun waterfall  
green and faintly violet

in the steep tree gloom

---

The day

the field

high grass

light

sun flow

waist

high

Midsummer

its dusty road

stillness

---

The sun hill

cold mist breath clouds  
walking through

the green horizon

amber tree edge late light

slowly

the sun-void

beneath bridge

the river dark flow  
snow-tufted

scrawled with grey ice at banks

below the hill  
the sun river asleep

go find it now wake it

---

"I"  
the windvoices

I

water full of  
light  
the night spruce

the crumbling watermoon

---

Spring the leaves

new  
light

long afternoon  
and warm

haunted light deep

time-filled

but not past  
but not future

radiant Now

streaming  
through high piled clouds

yet

haunted

---

of the  
falling leaf  
through  
the silent day

of the  
falling leaf

through

the silent day

## The still clouds

in blue

pond

sky

tree

veined

float through

the sun

leaves follow

tardy



Fields of snow  
frozen light  
white sun abyss high  
and  
pouring  
echoing  
aura upon  
aura through  
beyond  
faint blue white white sky  
Being is so thin here  
radiant non-being  
so full

---

Day warm

noon within

sun

bright

transparent air

White hatted gardener

bending through green shadows

grey glove metal flash

a cream wicker basket

noon

---

I eyes

almost closed

hot sun

lashes

chest sun

brow leaf shadows

ear air

mind noon listening

---

Morning rain  
flowers

leaves

all wet

heavy

---

Light's

empty

page

---

June rain

shoots

green

stems very light

black dirt soft warm  
dry now

blue sky bright overhead

cumuli  
filled with light

bees swerve in the air

---

The sun

all afternoon

cannot look at it

feel warmth see light

see the dark green plum tree  
galls on its trunk

crystallized amber dribbles  
down the bark

roses smolder  
bright  
and dark at once

gladiolas hectic  
hot pink

there are bright points  
in the air

---

Berries ripened  
black  
their broad leaves pale mauve canes  
with ruddy thorns  
every breeze moves them a bit  
but the hand picking  
from the fence's other side  
does not  
is just suddenly there  
and the old voice  
then saying hello a grey hat moving  
and we know it's ok  
we can pick on our side

---

The time

Now late summer

sleeping

in heat   silent the

fields   green

corn so high   and green

wheat wind paling   brushed amber

hay fields yellow   white and the wind

flowing through

opening them   to more light

day

active   burning

---



Surface

water flow

seed earth

change

flower rain

wind change

change

light cloud

halls peaks of emptiness

so far so high

change

---

Sun and  
light wind high  
fathoms of cloud caverns  
guy wires curtains of light  
blue of sky spaceless  
dimensionless  
ringing  
the chords of light  
deep and  
silent

---

## AFTERWORD

### Encounters With the Author in Taipei

We first made the author's acquaintance at a well-known restaurant in Taipei, the Wysteria Tea House, famous as having been a meeting place at one time for dissident intellectuals in the years of political struggle in Taiwan .

During the recent effort to publish his rather extensive work, we had various occasions to discuss aspects of his past and current writing.

Your poetry is quite varied in style and in form. Where do you locate yourself in the overall debate concerning poetic form?

I consider myself an eclectic. The main thing for me is to grasp, mentally, a certain object -- that is, an experience, a scene, an event -- to see it and feel it. Any language that seems to convey the reality of that is good, any language which remains merely language, merely words, is for me of no interest, in some cases it is actively negative, in the sense of being obstructive.

A cliché?

Yes or not even a cliché but in a way worse than that. Much of our language obscures the nature of reality. Words in themselves are, in a sense, the enemy of writing. I tell students that all the time. Words most often merely convey the usual accepted social understanding. Writing is for the purpose of grasping reality itself, which is always something other than the social understanding.

Do you consider yourself a political writer?

All writing is political in the sense of attempting to correct these false social understandings. At times its purpose is to merely reveal with a new freshness, a perceptual freshness, as it were. But even this itself has a certain basic political significance, in the sense that awakened human beings will act and think differently than those who are at rest in the normal tranquilized non-perception that we usually are caught up in.

Does living outside the United States help or hinder your writing?

I think it helps, in general. It is in some ways a very undeveloped culture, yet in other ways it is overbearing. (The US, that is.) There is, for example, a great deal of rather stifling political correctness, as it's called, and to get away from that is itself a positive thing. For a while I had no idea how I would ever get all this material published, especially if you're not there trying to do all the "networking" that is needed, and which I was absolutely terrible at anyway -- worse than terrible, I really had no clue, I still don't, I suppose. And then it came about that you could just do it all by yourself, by means of the internet.

How much material is it? It's quite a lot, it would seem.

Yes, I guess it's about 40 volumes or so. Over 2,000 pages, if you want to measure it like that. I don't know how much it would weigh.

There seem to be many styles represented. Was that something you consciously strove for?

Yes. I always wanted to be able to represent a wide variety of experiences. My first models for the artist were people such as Picasso, Goethe, Bach -- artists who could work in a very wide range of forms and even use widely different styles. Of course, I can't compare myself to people like that, but it was still a goal, to try many types of things.

What sorts of things are you working on currently?

Well as you know I am trying to get all this existing work published, going through it, touching it up here and there, proofreading, and so forth. After that, I think I might return to some translating work -- Holderlin especially, and some Chinese poets, but don't ask me which ones.

All right, but can you say whether they are modern or classical?

Classical. My favorite is Mung Hao-Ren, actually.

## About the Author

Steven Frattali is an expatriate American writer living in Taipei. He is the author to date of over 40 volumes of poetry, totaling over 2,000 pages of work. He is also the author of several critical works, among them *Person, Place and World: A Late Modern Reading of Robert Frost* and *Hypodermic Light: The Poetry of Philip Lamantia and the Question of Surrealism*.

## About the Banyan Press of Taipei

The Banyan Press of Taipei was founded in 2009 by Samuel Palmer and Steven Frattali. It plans to publish the work of expatriate Anglophone writers of the Pacific Rim who are working outside the norms of mainstream publishing. The Press does not at this time invite submissions, but it hopes to do so in the future.

